

**RUTGERS BIOMEDICAL AND HEALTH SCIENCES GUIDELINES for**  
**SUDDEN STUDENT DEATH**

Prepared by RBHS Office of Academic Affairs

I. When notified of a sudden student death

- A. Immediately notify the RBHS Office of Academic Affairs:
1. RBHS Office of Academic Affairs: 973-972-4380
  2. Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs will notify the Chancellor
  3. RBHS Chancellor will determine whether to notify President
- B. Office of Academic Affairs will notify and call together a team to address the crisis and to determine response to inquiries by students, faculty, staff and press:
1. Dean of student's school
  2. UBHC Student Wellness Program/EAP: Barbara Randall 732-235-5930, Theresa Miskimen 732-235-3490
  3. Campus Student Health Center: Newark: Noa'a Shimoni 973-972-8219, NB/Piscataway: Cathryn Heath 732-235-5160, Stratford: Katharine Garnier 856-566-6789.
  4. University Communications & Marketing: Jeff Tolvin 973-972-4501 (responsible for press contact)
  5. Department of Public Safety: John Huertas 973-972-7551 (responsible for all law enforcement contact)

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*The following will be notified, if appropriate to the situation:*

6. Office of General Counsel: Lisa Wahler 973-972-0916 (responsible for contact with Prosecutor's Office and outside attorneys), Barbara Turen 973-972-4705
  7. Student Housing and Residence Life: Rosemary Padilla 973-474-4100, or Shigeo Iwamiya 973-353-1037, (identify roommates, other affected students and assist family and other residents with housing issues, notify mail room to hold mail for family, do not return to sender; inventory student belongings)
  8. Office of International Services: Yocasta Brens-Watson 973-972-6138 (for international students)
- C. Dean or designee will identify School individuals who should be notified prior to an official statement acknowledging what has occurred: e.g. students, faculty and staff who have close relationships to deceased or are known to be "at-risk." (**See Exhibit 1**) School staff will contact those individuals to meet in person with the Dean or designee and Student Wellness/EAP counselor. If "at-risk" individuals are not associated with the Dean's school, the Dean or designee will notify the Dean of the individual's school or other appropriate authority to contact those individuals.
- D. Dean or designee will notify Office of Risk and Claims: Ron DeVos 973-972-6277

II. Initiate and maintain contact with family as soon as possible

- A. In police matters, defer to police decision to inform family of death.
- B. In non-police matters, Dean or Chancellor contacts family to express condolences.
- C. Student Wellness Program contacts any family members living near campus to offer counseling.

- D. Dean follows-up with communication to family the next day to:
    1. offer assistance.
    2. provide referrals to counseling services available in family's locale (from Student Wellness contacts).
    3. solicit information from family about funeral arrangements, family's wishes regarding privacy and confidentiality, family's wishes related to attendance by school community at funeral and any other requests from family.
    4. ask for the name and phone number of an appropriate family representative for the School to maintain communication with the family.
  - E. Dean and Chancellor decide about RBHS representation at funeral.
  - F. Dean contacts family approximately one month later to express concern/offer assistance.
- III. Student Wellness/EAP sends counseling staff immediately to location designated by Dean, upon notification of sudden student death.
- A. Student Wellness/EAP meets immediately with any individuals identified as having a close relationship to deceased or known to be "at-risk."
  - B. Student Wellness/EAP, in consultation with Dean, arranges times and locations for counseling sessions/crisis stations for students, faculty and staff.
  - C. Student Wellness/EAP identifies outside resources to assist family of deceased and/or to visit school for follow-up assistance.
  - D. Student Wellness/EAP meets with faculty and staff, if indicated, to
    1. anticipate student reactions and suggest ways to respond.
    2. alert faculty and staff to signs and symptoms of "at-risk" individuals that should be reported to the Dean (**See Exhibit 1**).
    3. announce availability of counselors for faculty, staff and students.
  - E. Student Wellness/EAP makes recommendations for further actions by School, if indicated.
- IV. Communicate with faculty, staff and students (In Cases of Suicide, see Exhibit 3)
- A. While the school community should be informed of the death as soon as possible, it is essential to obtain as much factual information as reasonable before initiating communications. This will prove useful in calming the community and countering misinformation that may circulate. For special concerns related to suicide, see **Exhibit 3**. For special concerns related to homicide, see **Exhibit 4**.
  - B. In appropriate cases, Dean meets with entire student body (by class, mass assembly or other means) to announce the death, give details that are officially available and offer times and locations for counseling services, along with Student Wellness phone numbers (732-235-5933, 800-327-3678).
  - C. Dean sends email to school faculty, staff and students as soon as appropriate details are available: indicate student's name, class, funeral arrangements and family's wishes, along with expression of sorrow and information regarding Student Wellness/EAP, Student Health Services, and other support services to be made available. (**See Exhibit 2** examples).

- D. Dean meets with Associate Deans and other administrative staff (e.g. Department Chairs) to:
1. give any other appropriate information.
  2. to instruct them that all contacts by press must be referred through the Dean to University Communications and Marketing.
  3. to determine whether small group learning units need to be addressed and re-established.
  4. to determine whether patients need to be notified and/or other students assigned for their clinical care.
  5. to remind them to be alert to signs of distress among members of the school community, so that Student Wellness/EAP can be called. (**See Exhibit 1** signs to watch for)
  6. to ask them to report to the Dean any rumors, so that they can be investigated and correct information disseminated.

V. Care for each other

- A. Throughout the first few days following the crisis, the Dean should work in consultation with the RBHS OAA with regard to resources for emotional, technical and administrative support.
- B. Crisis team meets regularly, as determined by the Chancellor, during the first week following the death, to debrief, plan and address ongoing needs. A follow-up meeting is held at the end of one week to review the steps taken and any changes needed in these guidelines.
- C. Encourage concerned individuals, including crisis team members, to talk to each other for support concerning the impact of the loss.
- D. Consider weekly meetings within the affected school(s) to monitor students, faculty and staff for successful recovery from the incident and any “at-risk” characteristics that may appear.
- E. Review special concerns in cases of suicide or homicide (**See Exhibits 3 & 4**)

VI. Administrative Details and Offices to be Contacted by School:

- A. Dean’s Office
1. Letter of condolence to family
  2. Disseminate information about funeral and/or memorial service to faculty, staff and students. Include driving directions to funeral services.
  3. Consider whether school memorial service, moment of silence, school flag half-mast or other gestures are indicated (Consult Student Wellness/EAP if death is by suicide; **See Exhibit 3**)
  4. Consider whether school schedule should be modified temporarily (If death is by suicide, use caution in changing routine; **See Exhibit 3**)
  5. Entertain requests for tangible memorials, such as plaques, scholarship funds, etc., keeping in mind that all future deaths will need to be addressed consistent with these decisions. (if death is by suicide, **see Exhibit 3**)
  6. Consider whether posthumous degree should be awarded (**See Exhibit 5** sample School policy)
- B. Student Affairs
1. Arrange for personal items to be returned to family (Empty locker and mailbox and maintain inventory of items returned to family).
  2. For students in Rutgers’ housing, contact mail room to deliver student’s mail to family or to school for forwarding to family; provide USPS change of address form for family to submit.

3. Remove student's name from class rosters.
  4. Consider providing sympathy cards at a central location for school community to write notes and sign.
  5. Consider leaving student's photo in any class composite photographs.
  6. Consider recognition in Yearbook and Convocation.
- C. School Registrar:
1. Contact RBHS Registrar: Susan Hamilton 973-972-9794
  2. Close academic record
  3. Inactivate all addresses and e-mail lists
  4. Prorate tuition and refund, if policy allows
  5. Contact School Business Office - Hold all bills
- D. Manager of Student Loans: Dianne Atwell 732-235-9181  
School provides family contact information so that Student Loans can obtain death certificate for purpose of cancelling student loans and promissory notes. Cancel bills and collections.
- E. Financial Aid Office: Robert Fahy 973-972-7030
1. Determine whether student was a financial aid recipient
  2. Work with family to cancel any loans that may be forgiven
- F. Billing and Collection: Harold Alexander 732-235-9174  
Hold all student bills and collection communications
- G. Payroll: Carole Watkins 732-235-9220  
If student worked at Rutgers, arrange for any wages owed to be sent to family
- H. Student ID Card:  
Public Safety Technologies - Gina Pensavalle - [gpensavalle@aps.rutgers.edu](mailto:gpensavalle@aps.rutgers.edu)
- I. RBHS Library: Judith Cohn 973-972-4353
- J. University Health Plans (student health insurance): Tien Lam 800-437-6448.  
Accidental Death and Dismemberment benefits and Return of Mortal Remains benefits may be available.
- K. School Alumni Affairs  
Remove from mailing and e-mail distribution lists
- L. IST: Denise Romano 973-972-3800
1. Remove from e-mail distribution lists
  2. Cancel e-mail account
- M. School GME Office  
If student applied for internship/residency program, notify appropriate party.
- N. University Marketing and Communications: Remove posted information about deceased as appropriate.

## EXHIBIT 1

### IDENTIFYING “AT-RISK” STUDENTS

Some students may be more vulnerable to the impact of a sudden loss than others, especially in cases of presumed suicide. These students should be contacted separately to ensure that their needs are met.

Signs of “at-risk” students:

- Close friends and roommates of deceased
- Students in clubs and activities with deceased
- Students with antagonistic relationship with deceased
- Students who have experienced losses that may be reactivated by the current death
- Students with drug/alcohol/emotional problems or previous suicide attempts or ideation
- Students preoccupied with death or suicide
- Students identified by peers, faculty or parents
- Students who self-identify
- Witnesses to the death

Reproduced in part from Underwood, Maureen M., LCSW and Dunne-Maxim, Karen MS, RN, *Managing Sudden Traumatic Loss in the Schools*, New Jersey Adolescent Suicide Prevention Project

**EXHIBIT 2**  
**SAMPLE COMMUNICATIONS TO FACULTY, STAFF AND STUDENTS**

- We are deeply saddened to inform you that John Smith, a member of the Class of 2020, passed away unexpectedly on Saturday, December 22, 2018.

Services are scheduled as follows:

Wake services will be held at Barrett Funeral Home, Wayne, New Jersey on Wednesday, December 26th from 7-9 pm and on Thursday, December 27th from 2-5 pm and 7-9 pm. Please contact the funeral home (201-238-4000) for directions. Parking is available in the PNC Bank lot.

A funeral Mass will be held on December 28th at 10:15 am at St. Patrick's Church, Wayne, New Jersey.

Grief counselors will be available on Monday, December 24, 2018 at 12:00 pm (NOON) in the second year lecture hall, MSB B 552. Dr. Cohen will also be present. Additional grief counseling sessions will be announced when they are finalized.

The Office of Student Affairs is open on Monday at 9:00 am. The phone number is 973-972-4783. The NJMS emergency line is 973-972-4490.

- Dear Students:

Due to the tragic news of John Smith's untimely passing, we will be holding special grief counseling sessions on the following dates and times:

Wednesday, January 2, 2018 @12:00 PM in MSB B552

Thursday, January 3, 2018 @1:00 PM in MSB B552

These sessions are open to all students who wish to attend. Bereavement counselors and mental health providers will be available to speak with you. In addition, the psychologists at UBHC (University Behavioral Healthcare) will be holding a number of slots open on those days for individual counseling. Please call 973-972-5429 or 732-235-5933 if you wish to schedule an appointment.

- We regret to inform you of the untimely passing of Jane Doe, a second year RSDM student, who resided in the 180 W. Market St. residence hall.

We recognize that this news is difficult for the entire RSDM community, and we have arranged for counselors to be available in MSB C654, Student Affairs Conference Room, between the hours of 1-3:00 PM and 4-5:00 PM today. These sessions are open to any students who wish to attend.

Our thoughts are with Jane's family and friends during this difficult time.

- As you all know, a second year dental student died suddenly on the night of January 7, 2020. As the University community mourns the tragic loss of our student, some of us may seek more information, asking how did this happen and why? We have limited ability to answer these questions, in part because we do not know precise answers, and in part out of respect for the privacy of the deceased and his family.

Here is a capsule of the facts we do know, which you may share with any students who ask for information:

1. Richard Doe was killed by a NJ Transit train on Wednesday, January 7th at approximately 10:15 p.m.
2. The location was Newark Penn Station.
3. The Star-Ledger has reported this event in one article as a suicide.
4. To our knowledge, no suicide note has been found.
5. The Essex County Prosecutor's Office has not allowed the University to view any evidence gathered.
6. The Medical Examiner and the Essex County Prosecutor are conducting an investigation to determine the cause and manner of death. Neither suicide nor accidental death has been confirmed. A final report is not expected for some weeks or months.

Sudden death of a young person, a member of our University family, causes shock, anger, denial and numerous other reactions. There is no "right" way to feel, and, whatever the cause of death, each of us will have unique responses to this tragedy. We can all help each other as friends and colleagues, and professional assistance is readily available. The Student Wellness Program has provided counselors to quickly assist students, faculty and staff since the day the death became known.

Anyone who wishes to consult a counselor should do so by calling 732-235-5933 or 1-800-327-3678 (24 hrs). I ask that anyone who identifies a member of the RBHS family who appears to need assistance notify me, so that help can be provided.

Warmest regards,

Dean

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➤ If the death has been declared a suicide:

This morning we heard the extremely sad news that John Doe took his life last night. I know we are all saddened by his death and send our condolences to his family and friends. Counselors will be located in the school today for students, faculty and staff who wish to talk to a counselor. Information about the funeral will be provided when it is available.

➤ Suspicious death not declared suicide:

This morning we heard the extremely sad news that John Doe died last night from a gunshot wound. This is the only information we have officially received on the circumstances surrounding the event. I know we are all saddened by John Doe's death, and send our condolences to his family and friends. Counselors will be located today in Room \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_a.m, \_\_\_p.m, and \_\_\_p.m. for students, faculty and staff who wish to talk to a counselor. Information about the funeral will be provided when it is available.

**EXHIBIT 3**  
**SUICIDE: SPECIAL CONCERNS**

- I. Suicide is believed to result from many factors in the life of the individual. Encourage open discussion of grief and loss, but avoid speculation about the reason for the suicide.
- II. Report facts, not suppositions. If death is under investigation by law enforcement, report that fact to the School community.
- III. Take care to avoid “contagion” by balancing commemoration of the life of the deceased with the need to avoid depicting suicide as heroic.
- IV. Intensify efforts to identify other “at-risk” students and bring them to counseling.
- V. Expect anger, blame and guilt as normal reactions.
- VI. Maintain the school schedule as closely as reasonable.
- VII. Focus any memorial activities on prevention and education; avoid glamorizing death.
- VIII. Alert Deans of all other schools on the campus, so that needs of students in their schools can be addressed.
- IX. Pay attention to feelings: Aftermath of suicide can involve many feelings – denial, searching for “why,” rumors, guilt, anger, scapegoating. Understand that suicidal inclination may not be apparent, even to mental health professionals.

Reference: Underwood, Maureen M. , LCSW and Dunne-Maxim, Karen MS, RN, *Managing Sudden Traumatic Loss in the Schools*, New Jersey Adolescent Suicide Prevention Project

**EXHIBIT 4**  
**HOMICIDE: SPECIAL CONCERNS**

- I. Expect a great deal of media interest. Notify University Communications and Marketing.
- II. Request additional uniformed Public Safety presence in the school to provide an atmosphere of support and control.
- III. Offer Public Safety escorts to parking lots and garages.
- IV. Recognize that violent deaths generate intense feelings. Students, faculty and staff may need many opportunities for support and counseling to deal with the trauma.

**EXHIBIT 5**  
**SAMPLE SCHOOL POSTHUMOUS DEGREE POLICY**

**SUBJECT: ACADEMIC AFFAIRS**

**TITLE: AWARDING POSTHUMOUS DEGREE**

**I. PURPOSE:**

The Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences School of XXXX seeks to recognize the academic achievements of its students. Occasionally, a student may die before completing all of the requirements for their degree. This policy establishes guidelines for the posthumous awarding of a degree with consideration to academic and institutional integrity

**II. ACCOUNTABILITY**

Under the Chancellor, the Dean of XXXX in consultation with the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

**III. POLICY**

**CRITERIA:**

- a. The student was enrolled in the second half of his/her final year of study at RBHS-XXXX at the time of death.
- b. The student successfully completed the core clinical rotations.
- c. The student was in good standing and would likely have completed all of the degree requirements had he/she lived.

**PROCEDURE:**

- a. A formal request may be initiated by a family member, a fellow student, a faculty member or the Dean. If the request is not made by a family member, the family should be contacted to ascertain their support for the possible award.
- b. The Associate Dean of Academic Affairs shall review the student's academic record and confirm whether the specified criteria exist. If so, the request for awarding a posthumous degree shall be forwarded to the school's Student Affairs Committee and Executive Council for approval.
- c. The request should then be reviewed and approved by the full RBHS-XXXX faculty.
- d. Degrees awarded posthumously will be so noted on the convocation/commencement program. A member of the deceased student's family will be permitted to participate, upon approval from the Dean, in the convocation/commencement program in which the deceased student would have been eligible to participate.
- e. The posthumous nature of the degree will be indicated on the diploma and in the student's transcript.